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Proactive educator wins "Excellence in IPM" award

ORANGE COUNTY, NY: Maire Ullrich, an educator in vegetable crops with Cornell Cooperative Extension in Orange County, has earned an "Excellence in IPM Award" from the New York State Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program at Cornell University for her innovative and proactive work in promoting IPM.

Ullrich works with about 80 vegetable growers in Orange County. This area is renowned for its highly productive "black dirt" soils, about 12,000 acres altogether, and most of it still in farmland.

One day, Ullrich may consult with a grower who's having trouble with black mold, a devastating pest that strikes after the crop has been harvested. The next day she might be holding a workshop for growers, showing that drainage ditches seeded with certain grasses actually don't (as was feared) provide a hiding place for tiny but destructive thrips insects-but do help prevent erosion.

With each consultation or demonstration, Ullrich is teaching IPM methods that stress integrated, low-impact ways of managing pests. Growers who become research partners help her test and refine the best and safest ways to deal with pests in a real-world, profit-driven setting.

Tom Zangrillo, president of the Orange County Vegetable Growers, credits Ullrich with making IPM the standard for vegetable growers in his area. "American growers can be slow to change their farming practices," he says. "Maire is enthusiastic and well-respected and liked. Her ability to teach IPM, especially its nuances with crops like onions and lettuce, is impressive."

Onions are worth about \$40 million per year to New York's farmers. The state consistently ranks among the top eight onion producers nationwide.

Ullrich has been a driving force behind promoting the "onion blight alert," developed by Cornell University scientists, to Orange County growers. An easy-to-use flow chart reminds growers of the weather cycles that promote or delay the onset of blight.

"Over the past 10 years, every grower in this area has saved, at minimum, \$80 to \$100 per acre in fungicides by using the blight alert," Ullrich says.

What does Ullrich see as the most exciting future development in agriculture? "The convergence of conventional and organic agriculture as the industry strives to find more effective biological and botanical controls. IPM is a farming style, a way of thinking, that promotes this convergence."

Ullrich receives her award on February 13 at the New York State Fruit and Vegetable Expo in Syracuse, N.Y.

For information about the New York State IPM Program, see <http://www.nvsipm.cornell.edu>.

For more about the NYS Fruit and Vegetable Expo, being held Feb. 13-16, see <http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/hort/expo/>

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